

REVELATION, PART 2

ACTS 10.9-23A

Last week, we began our look into the encounter between Peter, a Christian, raised as an orthodox Jew with all the prejudices against the Gentiles that accompany Jewish doctrines, and Cornelius, a Roman army officer who is at the same time a man who worships and prays to the God of Israel.

We saw last week that God is no respecter of persons for He heard the prayers and saw the works of Cornelius and sent an angel to him to instruct him to send for Peter, who was staying in Joppa with a tanner named Simon, and to request that Peter come to Cornelius' home in Caesarea.

As we read in **Acts 11.14**, the angel told Cornelius that upon Peter's arrival, "**...he will declare to you a message by which you will be saved, you and all your household.**"

I also pointed out last week how much of a challenge such a visit would be for Peter. The rules concerning cleanliness were strictly enforced by orthodox Jews, so for Peter to intentionally visit the home of a Gentile would compromise one of the foundational beliefs that he and his predecessors had held dear for generations.

Because Cornelius worshipped the same God the Jews worshipped and because of his apparent love for the Jews, it is very likely that Cornelius was familiar enough with Jewish custom to know that inviting Peter to his house would create a crisis of faith for Peter.

But we have to remember that God also knew it, and still He instructed Cornelius to make the call. God wanted the crisis of faith to take place because He knew Peter would have to demonstrate his faith, not only to God, but to those who followed Peter and who were learning from him.

Peter was a pillar of the church along with James and John (**Gal. 2.9**) and how he reacted to this call from God through Cornelius would set a precedent for the church and the gospel.

So now we find Peter on the rooftop of the house where he is residing. The roofs in that area were flat roofs. In warm weather the family might sleep up on the roof. The law of Moses stated that when people built a house, they had to put a wall around the edge of the roof so they would not be responsible for an injury if someone fell off the roof. (**Deut. 22:8**) The wall was usually about four feet high.

Here is a place where Peter can find some solitude, although the sounds of the village are in his ears – the traffic of the street below, the sounds of industry – with Simon the tanner going about his usual day of work – possibly even the sound of waves washing onto the beach below, the sound of gulls flying overhead.

From below, there is the sound of the Simon's family and the friends who are traveling with him. Also from below comes the delicious aromas of the noon meal being prepared. Altogether, it is enough to make serious contemplation a great challenge.

Peter has apparently been in a period of fasting because the Bible indicates that he was very hungry. The aroma of the food being prepared is having the predictable effect on his senses. His taste buds were at the point of blooming and the sound of his stomach may have been competing with those of the street below. All of these things made worship even more difficult.

According to Alfred Barnes: "*The Hebrews, Greeks, and Romans ...had but two meals, and the first was usually taken about ten or eleven o'clock. This meal usually consisted of fruit, milk, cheese, etc. Their principal meal was about six or seven in the afternoon...*" If this is accurate, it's still several hours before Peter would be able to break his fast.

Then without warning, Peter goes into a trance.

The Bible does not explain what it meant for Peter to be in a trance. The word translated trance is used seven times in the NT. Four of those seven times it is translated amazed or great astonishment.

Whatever is meant by the word "trance," Peter was in complete control of his awareness of what was happening around him.

The Bible says that three times a sheet came down before Peter containing *“all manner of four-footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air.”*

When God commanded Peter to rise, kill, and eat of the animals on the sheet, Peter recoiled from the command and declared that He had never eaten any unclean meat and would not start today.

For a better understanding of this event, let's take a very brief look at the concept of clean and unclean in the OT as it relates to food.

God created man and placed him in the Garden.

Gen. 1:29 *And God said, “Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food.” (ESV)*

The Bible does not explain any changes in this instruction from God between the Creation and the Flood. However, somewhere along the line, rules were established about the cleanness and the uncleanness of some animals, because when God instructed Noah about putting animals on the Ark, He said...

Gen. 7:2 *Take with you seven pairs of all clean animals, the male and his mate, and a pair of the animals that are not clean, the male and his mate, 3 and seven pairs of the birds of the heavens also, male and female, to keep their offspring alive on the face of all the earth.*

Following the Flood, God blessed Noah and said...

Gen. 9:3 *Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. And as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything.*

While this may seem to be contradictory, the reference to clean and unclean animals made to Noah most likely had more to do with animals that God would accept as a legitimate sacrifice than whether or not the animals were good for food.

Later, as part of the Law given to Moses, certain animals were declared "clean," and certain animals were "unclean." The people of Israel were commanded not to eat these unclean animals.

The classes of animals are described in detail in **Lev. 11** and **Deut. 14**. The unclean animals included the camel, badger, rabbit, lizard and pig.

The people were commanded to eat no pork, such as ham or bacon. They could only eat fish that had scales and fins, which meant they could not eat catfish.

Certain birds, mainly scavengers and birds of prey, were unclean, such as the eagle, hawk, vulture, owl, gull, and the stork.

There has been much conjecture about why God declared some meat to be unclean and others not. But in spite of all the speculation by commentators, the fact is that the Bible – that is God – never explains the difference between the two types of meat.

He gave the people a commandment and expected them to obey it without question. He is sovereign – He does what He wills to do.

Isaiah 46:10 *My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure.*

Why did God choose Israel? Because they were spiritually pure, powerful, or numerous?

No. They were simply God's choice for His purposes. Sovereign choices made by God according to His will and for His glory do not require any explanations.

As I said last week, God intended for the Jews to be a separate people from the world – not separated by distance, but by distinction. His purpose was that His people would be holy and thus He gave them the Law which could instruct in righteousness, even though it could not make them righteous.

In the midst of **Lev. 11**, the chapter that enumerates the law concerning what animals were clean and unclean, God said...

Lev. 11:44 *I am the LORD your God. You shall therefore consecrate yourselves, and you shall be holy; for I am holy... 45 I am the LORD who brings you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God. You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy.*

There were many other laws concerning things that could make a person unclean. Usually, the uncleanness ended at sundown, but a true orthodox Jew avoided becoming unclean at all costs.

Now, Peter is faced with an entire sheet of unclean animals, from which he is encouraged to kill and eat. The Bible says that, even after the sheet appeared three times, Peter was still confused about its meaning.

There has been much controversy about the meaning of Peter's vision.

Some have argued that God was demonstrating to Peter that all animals had been declared clean by God.

Mark 7:18 *So He said to them, "Are you thus without understanding also? Do you not perceive that whatever enters a man from outside cannot defile him, 19 because it does not enter his heart but his stomach, and is eliminated, thus purifying all foods?"*

Others argue that it would be a violation of His nature for God to change the Law, so that He never declared unclean animals to be clean. In other words, believers are still under the Law as given in **Lev. 11** and **Deut. 14**.

But what these people seem to forget is what Jesus said in...

Matt. 5:17 *Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.*

Gal. 3:21 *Is there a conflict, then, between God's law and God's promises? Absolutely not! If the law could give us new life, we could be made right with God by obeying it. (NLT)*

But our righteousness and holiness and sanctification are not discovered in our actions or attendance to a set of rules, but according to the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit who dwells in us.

Furthermore, the NT goes on to speak about the relationship between food and righteousness in several places.

1 Cor. 8:8 *...food does not commend us to God; for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the worse.*

Rom. 14:14 *I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself, but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean.*

1 Tim. 4:4 *For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, 5 for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer.*

Now, getting back to Peter, here he stands confronted by this vision and an invitation from God with the invitation to kill and eat.

Yet Peter refused because he believed that to do so would make him unclean. How would this make Peter unclean?

Imagine, instead of a sheet full of animals, that there were only two: a cow – a clean animal, and a pig – an unclean animal.

Why couldn't Peter just choose the cow and kill it and eat it?

1. Any animal is unclean after it is dead. The only animals which were not unclean after death are those offered as sacrifices to God. So, to kill an animal would make Peter unclean and would interfere with his worship.
2. He probably assumed, as did all other Jews, that the cow, though clean in itself, was now made unclean by association with the pig.

The Jews believed that to associate with those who were not Jews would make them unclean. There were not to socialize with non-Jews and definitely could not enter into their houses.

But there was a lesson Peter had not yet learned. Even though Jesus himself walked among men of all nations, He was never guilty of being unrighteous or unclean. He associated with sinners and with non-Jewish people such as the Samaritan woman in **John 4**, yet maintained His holiness all the while.

The lesson that Peter was in the process of understanding was that "...to God, it was not being near pagans which made one unholy, but in being like pagans." (Author unknown.)

Peter might be able to say that nothing profane or unclean had ever entered his mouth, but he could not say that things profane or unclean had not come out of his mouth.

God answered Peter's refusal by saying...

Acts 10:15 *And the voice came to him again a second time, What God has cleansed and pronounced clean, do not you defile and profane by regarding and calling common and unhallowed or unclean. (Amplified)*

God said to Peter, "It really makes no difference what you think about clean and unclean. If I said that the cow is a clean animal, who are you to identify it as unclean simply because of its association with a pig? If I tell you that the pig which was once said to be unclean is now clean, then who are you to question me? I am God. And I determine the standards of holiness."

Peter still struggled with all of this while he remained on the roof. He may have stayed up there all day wondering what all of this meant except that God had other plans for him.

Verse 17 says that while Peter was standing before God asking questions about the meaning of the vision, the men from Cornelius were standing before the gate asking whether Peter was living in this villa.

The Spirit told Peter to go down and meet the three men (*Notice how precise these words are from the Holy Spirit – from God*) and not to fear because **"I have sent them."**

You can underline those words in your Bible because here is evidence of the deity of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit said, **"I have sent them."** Later, in **verse 28**, Peter will tell Cornelius, **"God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean."**

Clearly, Peter understood the voice of God and the voice of the Holy Spirit were one and the same.

Peter obeyed the Spirit and went down from the roof to meet the men who were at the gate. In fact, the men were already in the house (**Acts 11.11**).

While Peter had many doubts about the purpose and meaning of the vision he had had on the rooftop, it is apparent from what happened next that he had begun to understand the message that God intended for him to learn.

Acts 10.21-23a

As the men explained their purpose in visiting, I believe Peter's eyes were opened to the meaning of the vision on the roof.

Peter did not recoil from the presence of these non-Jewish guests. In fact, not only did he welcome them into the house, he gave them lodging for the night – something he probably would never have done before this day.

God was in the process of revealing something fantastic to Peter, to the church, and to all the world:

- the fact that the plan of redemption – put into place before the foundation of the world – was not limited to one small sect or religion or nationality,
- but was, indeed, intended to be shared with all men – with all people groups – beginning in Jerusalem and extending to the ends of the earth, regardless of their tribe, their nationality, race, or gender.

The promise that God had made to Abraham so many hundreds of years before – that God would bless Abraham and his descendants and that the whole world would be blessed through him – through his Seed – referring to Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the Redeemer, the Savior of the world – was coming to fruition in Peter's lifetime.

As we were reminded in our *Radical* study this week, **Psalms 67** speaks so beautifully about this circle of blessing that can only be found in the plans of God.

God blesses us so that we will rejoice in Him and make Him known to the nations so that all the nations will worship Him, releasing even more blessings upon the earth and upon God's creation.